



*Oatlands Plantation, Leesburg, Virginia  
Photo courtesy of: Paul Glenshaw*

## Chapter 6

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## Heritage Tourism

Heritage tourism, correctly and comprehensively understood, can bring together individuals and organizations committed to the preservation of our heritage resources with those concerned for our economic well-being, simultaneously generating a very high level of citizen participation, stewardship and enjoyment.

While the existing mechanisms for historic preservation and development are impressive, they are insufficient. The existing mechanisms fail to foster the County's heritage industry in a coherent fashion, offer no viable plan for supporting both public and private efforts in Loudoun's rural economy and continue to cost the County valuable assets in its historic inventory.

Not until a systematic assessment is made of this "industry" will it be evident how heavily Loudoun's current prosperity relies upon the marketing and promotion of visitation to its historic sites and cultural landscapes. The number of cars filling Oatlands' parking lot is one obvious measure of this boost to the County's economy. So too are less conspicuous contributions such as the number of visitors to Loudoun's bed and breakfast establishments, Civil War battlefields and sites, antiques stores; vineyards, and working farms. Nevertheless, no institution exists whose mission is to develop and preserve heritage sites.



Waterford Fair, 2008  
Photo courtesy of: Mary Kenesson

*Visitor spending in Loudoun County in 2006 was 1.2 billion dollars. This reduced taxes by \$577 per household. This is money imported into the County for which we pay little or nothing in community services and infrastructure.*

According to *Profiting from Preservation, The Economic Benefits of Historic Preservation in the Mosby Heritage Area*, produced by the Mosby Heritage Area Association, in 2001 visitors to historic sites stayed an average of 5.7 nights per visit while cultural travelers stayed an average of 5.1 nights. This exceeds the average pleasure visitor stay of two nights. *The Historic/Cultural Traveler* reports that

expenditures per trip were also higher for historic travelers, spending an average of \$722, compared to cultural travelers, spending an average of \$603, and all travelers, spending an average of \$437.

While the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center draws millions to our region, it will be Loudoun's historic and rural settings that will convince them to linger for days and perhaps even longer. The Loudoun Convention and Visitors Association (LCVA) marketing campaigns regularly capture the notion of Loudoun as a place for the denizens of urban America to enjoy a slower pace of living and glimpse of rural life as it was experienced by our ancestors. At the same time, there is an obvious connection between the rural tourism efforts and the availability of services and amenities most often found in eastern Loudoun and the towns; these being hotels, restaurants and other services. There are important tourism attractions in Loudoun including golf courses, convention and meeting facilities and retailers that do not fall under the heritage tourism definition. Combining heritage sites with alternative destinations and with the appropriate traveler services multiplies the economic benefit.

Heritage tourism programs should complement, enhance and use other segments of the tourism industry in Loudoun to create a synergy that increases the demand for each segment. Understanding the purpose



of the trip as well as what activities visitors include in their plans will increase the economic impact from heritage preservation through increased visitation.

## Heritage Tourism Policies

1. As Loudoun County's programmatic arm for tourism, the Loudoun Convention and Visitor's Association should lead and implement the heritage tourism program providing the marketing, product development, business development and research support necessary to help to generate visitor spending.
2. County-owned heritage sites appropriate for visitation should develop educational materials and conduct tours. Marketing efforts should be coordinated with the LCVA in order to link individual resources to expand their visitation. Non-County owned sites should be encouraged to do likewise.
3. The County will maximize the tourism opportunities springing from the State's 2007 celebration of the first English settlement in Virginia, the opening of the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, the County's own 250th anniversary of its formation and Leesburg's 250th anniversary.
4. As part of an overall heritage awareness program there will be the continuation of heritage tourism awareness building to promote Loudoun's heritage tourism assets to our residents.
5. The LCVA will continue to represent the tourism industry regionally, statewide and nationally to ensure that heritage tourism opportunities are connected to Loudoun's visitor experience.
6. The development of new heritage sites should be encouraged and fostered, such as those associated with Civil War battles and skirmishes and other historical events.
7. The Heritage Commission will provide support to heritage property owners interested in properly identifying, interpreting, establishing and maintaining a heritage tourism site, set the standards and regularly assess the authenticity, readiness and suitability of proposed heritage tourism sites.
8. To ensure an authentic educational experience, the County will adopt a series of criteria to assist in identifying sites, services, and events that authentically convey the heritage of Loudoun County. An authentic resource is defined as:

***Authentic Resource:*** A site, service, or event which reflects the County's heritage by retaining features which existed during its period of significance, and by demonstrating an association with historic events, persons, architecture, engineering, or technology. It is not necessary for a site, service, or event to retain all of the features that it had during its period of significance, but it must retain enough of these features to present a clear picture of local heritage.

- For a Historic Site, evidence of authenticity is strengthened by listing on, or eligibility for listing on, the National or State Register of Historic Places or the Loudoun Heritage Register.
- For a Museum, evidence of authenticity is strengthened by interpretation that meets professional standards such as the standards established by the American Association of Museums. Collections, which are not displayed in an interpreted historic building, must have sufficiently detailed interpretation to convey a strong sense of local heritage.

9. Heritage and related resources that are officially designated by the County will be encouraged to participate in targeted advertising and identification programs. Participants in the programs shall be provided with marketing devices that help visitors identify authentic heritage tourism sites as places where they can be assured of obtaining an authentic and high-quality experience. Incentives such as those listed here could be made available to officially designated heritage and related resources:
  - Assistance with grant writing needs
  - Appropriate preference within the grant criteria and priorities for each grants program or funding requests from Loudoun County
  - Special publications that feature only the officially designated heritage and related resources
  - Special tours and media opportunities for additional visibility
  - Priority consideration for use of images in promotional materials
10. To maintain a quality heritage tourism experience, the County, through the Heritage Commission, will establish readiness criteria that shall be met by all heritage tourism businesses that wish to participate in the heritage tourism program. The readiness criteria address business activities such as hours of operation, events, history interpretation and availability of customer services.
11. The County will remove obstacles from the Zoning Ordinance and Facilities Standards Manual (FSM) to facilitate heritage resource protection, preservation and adaptive reuse as tourism facilities. For instance, historic sites and buildings should not be placed in a nonconforming status by zoning ordinance standards. FSM and Zoning standards should not require site design features that detract from the authenticity of the tourist experience, endanger the integrity of the resource or prevent the adaptive reuse of the site.
12. Since appropriate, convenient tourist services are an essential complement to heritage tourism development, the zoning ordinance should reflect the need for restaurants, overnight accommodations, support shops and other services both as part of a heritage tourism facility and in reasonable proximity to such facilities. Development of such uses is preferred as adaptive reuse or in the towns and villages where infrastructure exists so that tourist facilities do not impact the integrity and authenticity of heritage sites.
13. The County will establish incentive programs to assist prospective tourism businesses including appropriate site preservation and maintenance, business start-up or gap financing and educational and technical support.
14. The County will identify a sustainable source of funding to enhance the current heritage tourism program. Because heritage tourism plays an educational and preservation role for local residents as well as tourists, the County should not rely solely on Transient Occupancy Taxes but should seek funds from other government and private sources.
15. The County should help to expand the heritage educational opportunities that increasingly are part of the tourism experience. Use of public sites for archaeological research, as museums and libraries provides an added dimension to the tourism experience.



## Implementation

The Heritage Preservation Plan envisions that the County's tourism program will continue to be driven by entrepreneurial efforts of private property owners supported in part by Transient Occupancy Tax funds and other sustainable funding sources. The LCVA should play a central marketing and coordination role in concert with the County's Department of Economic Development and private organizations. However, the function of developing authentic, appropriately interpreted and preserved heritage tourism resources could most effectively be handled under the purview of a Heritage Commission.<sup>1</sup>



*Waterford Fair, 2008  
Photo courtesy of: Mary Kenesson*

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<sup>1</sup> The Heritage Commission is a body which includes stakeholders and experts in a variety of fields related to historic preservation, including heritage tourism, as well as marketing and business. The Commission is to undertake several responsibilities identified in the Heritage Preservation Plan. In this case it is to be a conduit for financial and technical assistance to owners of significant heritage resources who wish to restore and interpret their resource and to maximize its economic potential. The Commission will also seek out new products and resources and encourage coordination between different operators to maximize the economic return to the County while meeting preservation objectives.